

## THE FEDERAL DIARY

# NASA in Line for Buyout

By Mike Causey  
Washington Post Staff Writer

**A**lthough government-wide buyouts are on hold, at least until Congress returns in January, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration may get its own authority next year to pay selected employees as much as \$25,000 if they quit early or retire.

The Senate's approval of a NASA-only buyout bill before the Thanksgiving recess could spell trouble or mean delays for thousands of U.S. workers who are chomping at the bit to go, and for agencies that are under the gun to trim both their work forces and their supervisor-to-employee ratios.

NASA requested the buyout authority this year. It was approved by the House. But the NASA buyout package was put on hold in the Senate because the Clinton administration decided to press for approval of government-wide buyouts. That package would have let agencies offer buyouts and early retirement during a 90-day period that would have ended next September.

But the buyout package went to Congress late. And Senate and House differences over who would get the payments and the timing of the buyouts stalled the proposal. By that time, more politically pressing legislation, including budget bills, NAFTA and the Brady gun-control bill, took precedence. The government-wide buyout plan, which appeared to be a sure thing in early October, flopped like a Thanksgiving turkey.

In the closing hours of Congress, however, the Senate agreed to a NASA-only buyout package that is similar to one approved by the House. But there are some differences in how the buyouts would be financed that may require a House-Senate conference.

Defense was the first department granted buyout authority. So far this year, it has paid more than 30,000

workers to leave. The buyouts are equal to the value of the employee's severance entitlement or \$25,000, whichever is less. Congress also has approved buyouts and early retirement for the CIA, Government Printing Office, Library of Congress and General Accounting Office. Those five are the only federal agencies that can buy out employees.

Clinton administration officials originally estimated that 60,000 to 100,000 workers—outside Defense, the CIA and the three legislative branch agencies—would get buyouts between October of this year and September 1994. Obviously, that timetable is off.

The question now is whether Congress and the administration will stick with efforts to offer a government-wide buyout package or will abandon that in favor of agency-specific buyout bills.

### Locality Pay Raise

President Clinton is scheduled to decide today whether to grant locality pay raises to federal workers in the Washington-Baltimore area. The proposed raise is 4.23 percent, but it won't be official until approved by the White House. For a preview of what the 1994 locality raise may look like, check today's Federal Page.

### Health Insurance

There will be a health insurance open season town meeting at 7:15 p.m. today at Luther Jackson Middle School in Falls Church. The session, sponsored by Rep. Leslie L. Byrne (D-Va.), is open to government workers, retirees and family members who must select health plans within the next two weeks.

### Job Mart

The D.C. government's HIV-AIDs program is looking for investigators, \$23,173 to \$36,195; public health analysts, \$31,027 to \$47,903; and a public health adviser, \$25,734 to \$39,964. Call Richard Nelson at 202-727-0808.